

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

The Acorn School for Social Justice

High School 498

**1396 Broadway
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Michael Prayor

Dates of review: January 5 - 6, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Shermila Bharat

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Acorn School for Social Justice is a high school with 407 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 76% Black, and 23% Hispanic students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 90%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school environment fosters student's social emotional growth enabling them to accelerate their academic achievement.
 - Teachers' create a nurturing environment and know their students on both social emotional and academic levels. This has led students to feel that they are being prepared for life with the understanding that you can't do what you want, you have to listen to someone. As one student shared, "I consider my class my family and my teacher, a second mom. ... is helping her students become better writers because she sits down and explains the sequence rules of writing and essay and I am now one of her top students."
 - Through participation in student government, the Young Ladies and Gentlemen's Club (YOGC), teen summits, and mentoring programs, students are afforded well-varied opportunities to actively engage in the daily life of school. Students work hard for their grades and as stated, "everyone has accepted the higher expectations. You can see and feel the change in spirit."
- The school's drive to enhance its student's academic and social experience is grounded in the community's thorough analysis of data and paced out in long- and short-term plans.
 - The school's three-year action plan is based on a clear understanding of data leading to addressing a coherent set of key focus areas including home school communication, planning structures to ensure targets are clear and measurable, and a viable cohesive curriculum that integrates the Common Core State Standards. In leveraging the curriculum, leadership, and the school's systems and structures, all members of the community have a role in ensuring the success of students, which includes individualized actions plans for students in need of additional support.
 - The ATM (Attitude, Behavior and Class work by the scholar) is an anecdotal system quantified by a Likert scale of 1-5 that gives teachers the opportunity to evaluate every student in their class on a monthly basis according to the three categories. Data from teachers is augmented by attendance data, the student's grade point average, and Regents' data and is shared effectively with all teachers and families. The school's pupil personnel team astutely uses the data to create individual plans for students to address areas with which they are struggling and to reward student performance. As a result, students are tracked frequently to ensure that all steps are taken to closing achievement gaps and providing them with college and career readiness.
- Frequent learning opportunities for teachers are well matched to the school's data driven goals and empower teachers to differentiate lesson leading to accelerated student achievement.
 - Through a tiering process that is based on student needs and level of proficiency, teachers differentiate lessons by offering choices to students. In the self-contained special education class, students choose reading material

and then respond to questions aligned with the goals of the lesson. Based on individualized education plans, students are able to articulate the concept of flexible grouping based on their strengths and areas for growth.

- Students who enter the school with a level 1 to 2 reading proficiency, are scheduled for an accelerated program that includes double period classes, a focus on skill building, and an emphasis on the school's belief around four essentials, task analysis, selective-and purpose driven reading, focused note-taking and the integration of sources into texts, and writing. All of which has led to high credit accumulation, increased passing percentages on the Regents, and the school receiving an A on its most recent Progress Report.
- School leaders skillfully align resources to its priorities in ways that promote achievement of its goals and long-term vision.
 - Leadership astutely recognizes that the building of twenty-first century skills, and differentiation, are critical for students to compete in the global environment and achieve academically. Consequently, they have invested in technology including Smart Boards in every classroom, laptops, and Moodle classrooms for struggling students that provide flex time for students to work independently at their own readiness levels. The success of these practices are reflected in the most recent Progress Report showing instances of students' performance and progress outperforming overall City results.
 - The school's programming enables its two guidance counselors to push into classrooms to work with teachers and students. Counselors observe and work with focus students and meet weekly with cohort groups that include students and teachers in order to identify and monitor supports needed to ensure that students are on the academic track to graduate on time.
- Ongoing analysis of itemized assessment results and class work inform instructional planning so that achievement of learning goals can be measured and instruction modified to meet student needs.
 - Daily assessment of student learning targets for each unit through conferencing, anecdotal records, student work, and the use of Castle Learning with its instant feedback to students and teachers regarding progress on a given topic, helps teachers to plan differentiated lessons. As a result, students including those with individualized educational plans and the highest achieving, can access content at their readiness level as teachers monitor and adjust for teaching and learning.
 - Content level teams meet weekly to plan and share strategies to ensure alignment of assessments to the State curricula. Suitable adaptations relative to the needs of students, results in the development of common assessments for mid-terms and final exams in each of the core subjects.
- Observations reinforce for the teaching staff the commitment to a clear instructional focus that has produced coherent school wide practices.
 - School leaders support instructional coherence by looking at teacher practice and student outcomes through scholarship reports and an observation tool linked to school wide goals. As a result, teachers receive feedback on their strengths and areas for growth along with explicit next steps.

- Teachers set benchmarked professional goals with the principal based on the University of Southern California, Santa Cruz model's continuum of teacher professional development. This allows teachers to self reflect on their process and gives administration a framework for differentiated support. Staff are now aware of how their pedagogy links to student achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Embed an inquiry approach in the work of teacher teams so that there is a greater capacity to diagnose learning needs and identify change strategies needed to develop academically targeted support for groups of students.
 - Although the majority of teachers are engaged in looking at data and developing plans to work with struggling students, an inquiry approach to looking at large groups of students around a single focus is lacking. This results in incremental changes rather than a systematic approach that would address a group such as Black students for which the school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress.
- Build on promising initiatives to systematize the measurement of student outcomes on diverse criteria to achieve coherence in monitoring progress.
 - The school has instituted a new grading policy vetted by the cabinet, teachers, and the school leadership team. However, as it is in the embryonic stage and departments have flexibility in manipulating the point values, there is uneven clarity by students minimizing the effect of the change relative to its purpose, and its impact is not yet evident in any hard data.
- Establish success criteria for teacher teams to improve monitoring of impact.
 - The school's distributive leadership structure enables teacher teams to meet regularly with a lead facilitator to review student data. Teams are also engaged in instructional rounds that are ideally designed to give feedback in order to improve practice, however, there is no structure to measure the effectiveness of the leadership, or instructional rounds process, on classroom and/or school practice.
- Enrich the curriculum to further embed rigor and engagement to stimulate the intellectual growth of all learners.
 - The school's curriculum maps do not yet fully incorporate the evolving State standards nor are they suitably aligned with the State content standards. Therefore, there is a lack of clarity and rigor of performance tasks aligned with the school's vision of college and career readiness for all students.
 - Currently the school does not augment periodic assessment data and State assessment data with more immediate data garnered from student work. Consequently, timely adjustments in planning to ensure lessons are at the appropriate level of difficulties so that all students are challenged and engaged is hampered.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Acorn HS for Social Justice	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X		
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X	
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X	
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X	
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?		X		
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X		

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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